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Protesters Arrested After Standoff With Police Over Hotel Construction

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About a dozen people were arrested late Wednesday after a standoff with police over the construction of a hotel in the Novokosino district of eastern Moscow.

Protesters have occupied the construction site for several days during the day, preventing construction machinery from entering the area. They have said the hotel is being built for illegal migrants and that the district needs social infrastructure like schools and kindergartens rather than hotels. Anti-migrant sentiment has been in the spotlight in Russia since a nationalist riot took place in another peripheral district of Moscow, Biryulyovo, in October.

Dozens of protesters gathered for a regular monthly meeting between Natalya Artamoshina, head of the Novokosino district board, and residents of the district to discuss the hotel's construction. The meeting was also attended by Vsyevolod Timofeyev, prefect of Moscow's Eastern Administrative District, a larger territorial unit that includes Novokosino.

But only some of the demonstrators managed to get into the building where the meeting was being held, while the others were prohibited from entering. Protesters also said that the authorities had packed the hall with public sector employees to ensure support for their plans.

Hot tea and sandwiches were served to those remaining outside. Some of the demonstrators joked that their protest was beginning to resemble the permanent protest camp on Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kiev and was only lacking tents and barricades. The brandishing of Russian national flags — not a common attribute at previous rallies — also echoed the Ukrainian protests.

At the meeting, Timofeyev and Artamoshina defended the construction plans, provoking the protesters' anger. Some of them blocked the prefect's car when it was driving out of the area and were dispersed by police.

The demonstrators then proceeded to the construction site, where several people, including a Moscow Times reporter and Nikolai Lyaskin, head of the People's Alliance party's Moscow branch, were arrested without being informed about the reasons of their detention. Lyaskin, a supporter of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, is planning to run in Novokosino during the next City Duma election, slated for September.

The Moscow Times reporter was released Wednesday without any charges, while Lyaskin and another protester were charged with resisting arrest and also released. Five of the detainees spent the night at the police station.

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